

## JENNIE BRADLEY ROESSING AND THE FIGHT FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN PENNSYLVANIA

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JENNIE BRADLEY ROESSING was at the wheel of the truck when it pulled into Pittsburgh's Schenley Park on July 5, 1915 — she and a small group of dedicated suffragists were completing the first two weeks of a four-month state tour of the Liberty Bell of Suffrage. They joined a large contingent of Pittsburgh suffragists for a demonstration at the city's first Americanization Day ceremonies. Barred from taking their truck into the park on this commemorative occasion, the suffragists had secretly planned their own silent procession to conclude the official program. With the Pennsylvania referendum on woman suffrage coming in November, the women were determined to carry their votes-for-women theme to the anticipated crowd.

After numerous speeches, two thousand children dressed in red, white, and blue formed a human flag and rose to sing "America." As they finished, twelve groups of women appeared in turn over the crest of Flagstaff Hill and marched into place in a large semicircle behind the dais. Except for college women in caps and gowns, all wore white dresses with yellow sashes. Each group — grandmothers, young mothers, journalists, teachers, nurses, college women, social workers, business women, unmarried taxpayers, physicians, foreign women, and former residents of suffrage states — raised a banner pleading for equal suffrage. One banner read: "We are grandmothers. Will our sons, the native sons of this state and the naturalized sons of other lands, deny us the right to vote?" The message of the unmarried taxpayers read: "Taxation without representation is still tyranny. Who represent us?" Another banner stated, "We are young mothers. We are rearing sons to vote. Give us the vote to aid in passing laws that help in governing the home." After standing in place for fifteen

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—Editor

minutes, the women continued silently down the hill to the suffrage truck to listen to speeches.<sup>1</sup>

Late that night Jennie Roessing reflected on the day's events. Nobody had tried to block the suffragists' unique pageant. The total silence in the park as the audience craned their necks to read the banners convinced her that they had had the desired effect. Besides, hundreds had followed the women back to the Liberty Bell to hear the speeches. Surely the women had created a different image from the rebellious English suffragettes who disrupted meetings, defied authority, and endured forced feedings in jail. Nor could the crowd equate this group with the meek, submissive women who spurned suffrage with the argument that "a woman's place is in the home." But had they swayed any votes? The answer to that question would have to wait. For now, rest was important. The long and tiring tour of the Liberty Bell had nearly four months to go before it reached Philadelphia by Election Day.

The women's surprise appearance at the Americanization Day ceremony typified the organization and creativity of Pennsylvania suffragists. By 1914, eleven western states had granted women equal voting rights; numerous others permitted women to vote for certain offices. Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Maine, alone among the states north of the Mason-Dixon Line, denied women even partial suffrage. These suffragists hoped to make Pennsylvania the first state east of the Mississippi to grant women full suffrage, but they recognized the magnitude of their task.

Unlike western suffragists, Pennsylvania women could not count on political leaders for support in their campaign. In the West, incumbent legislators or strong challengers had seen a potential ally in women voters. In the Wyoming Territory, for example, which had granted equal suffrage in 1869, legislators saw a public relations value in portraying women as community builders who tamed frontier rowdiness. Political expediency moved Utah territorial lawmakers to grant woman suffrage to help preserve Mormonism against encroachment. Colorado Populists in the 1890s supported equal suffrage to increase their voting strength. Likewise, western Progressives in the 1910s wanted new allies in cleaning up corrupt local governments, enacting Prohibition, and sponsoring legislation for women and children.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, powerful political forces in Pennsylvania, particu-

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<sup>1</sup> *Pittsburgh Sun*, July 6, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the western suffrage campaigns, see Alan P. Grimes, *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (Westport, Conn., 1967).

larly the liquor interests and the political bosses they supported, viewed women as an enemy eager to upset the status quo. Pennsylvania suffragists had already scored a major political victory in getting the suffrage issue on the ballot. Winning the statewide referendum in a large industrial state against a determined and well-organized opposition would, however, provide American suffragists with their greatest challenge to that time.

Jennie Bradley Roessing, the dedicated crusader who expected to take the women's Liberty Bell to every county in the state, headed the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association (PWSA). She exemplified the "new American woman" — a woman with education, leisure time, assertiveness in the interests of women, and a social consciousness — and had skillfully maneuvered the suffrage amendment through two successive terms of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Then, by shifting emphasis from the justice of woman suffrage to the political value of the vote, she won widespread popular support for her cause. The Pennsylvania campaign, particularly in Allegheny County, anticipated the changing themes of the national crusade. Moreover, Roessing's strategies, perfected in Pennsylvania, later formed her agenda in her role as program chairwoman of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in the critical years just before passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Jennie Roessing had devoted most of her adult life to the suffrage movement. Born in Pittsburgh about 1882, Roessing had received the financial backing and encouragement for her life of reform from her father.<sup>3</sup> John Bradley, a highly-skilled cutter-tailor, had emigrated to America from England in 1870 and, within a decade, had built a successful custom tailoring business in Pittsburgh. A classic example of the American success story, Bradley tried to convey to Jennie, his only child, his faith in his adopted country. He introduced her to the suffrage issue on one of their trips abroad. "Jennie," he pointed out, "women, criminals, idiots, and the insane are the only groups in America without the franchise."<sup>4</sup> That remark helped to inspire her forty-year fight for women's rights as repayment to her father for a private-school education, numerous opportunities for world travel, and a substantial financial inheritance.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roessing left few clues to her birthdate. Her graduation from high school in 1900 suggests, however, that she was born about 1882.

<sup>4</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, Mar. 11, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> John Bradley would have been pleased, but hardly surprised, that his daughter later willed the bulk of her estate to the federal government, to which they both attributed their opportunity for a life of comfort.

We lack records on Jennie Bradley's life between her graduation from Thurston Preparatory School for Girls in 1900 and 1904, when she began her suffrage work. Probably travel and club work occupied much of her time, as with many in her social set. We do know that by 1904, she was well acquainted with Lucy Kennedy, daughter of Pittsburgh civic leader Julian Kennedy, Mary Flinn, daughter of "Boss" William Flinn, the Republican leader, Mary Bakewell, of the Bakewell Glass Company family, and Hannah Patterson, daughter of West Newton bank president John G. Patterson. It was probably during this time, too, that Jennie met her future husband, Frank M. Roessing, a civil engineer in a construction business that built roads, bridges, and tunnels for the city of Pittsburgh.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Jennie had been building the associations that would ease her entry into the world of politics.

Jennie Roessing's career in the suffrage movement began in 1904, several years before her marriage, when she, Lucy Kennedy, Mary Bakewell, Hannah Patterson, and Mary Flinn organized the Allegheny County Equal Rights Association (ACERA). At first, the women had been so reluctant to assert their leadership that they chose Julian Kennedy to head their group.<sup>7</sup> Although few other suffrage organizations chose male leaders, the Pittsburgh women's lack of confidence makes an interesting commentary on contemporary women's attitudes toward more dynamic roles for their sex. The women did summon enough courage to volunteer to serve as hosts for the 1907 convention of the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association. They found this experience enlightening.

Because eastern Pennsylvania had been, far more than any other section of the state, a center of reform agitation since the 1830s, the Eastern District had always dominated the state suffrage association. The 1907 convention was no different. Until then, the Pittsburgh group, like other suffrage organizations in the state and nation, had concentrated on educational tactics. However, several days of speeches, teas, reports, and meetings left them convinced that socializing among the elite and giving speeches to the committed would gain few converts.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In 1913, Roessing formed the Roessing Manufacturing Company. A few years later, he assumed the presidencies of both the Pittsburgh Electro-Galvanizing Company and the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Sharpsburg. Jennie Bradley Roessing's papers include only the most minimal references to her husband and no details of their marriage or divorce. Frank later married Ethel Harvey in 1938, when he was serving as director of public works in Pittsburgh.

<sup>7</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, Nov. 4, 1956.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Pittsburgh suffragists found the work of the national organization similarly disappointing. The older generation of suffragists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, stressed the justice of equal suffrage rather than addressing the needs of immigrant and working-class women. Moreover, middle-class women, who seemed generally content to consolidate their positions in the home rather than strive for identities outside it, viewed the feminist position as too radical an alternative for their notions of the "woman's proper place." Briefly, between 1900 and 1904, Carrie Chapman Catt, Susan B. Anthony's successor as president of the NAWSA, brought new vigor to the organization by starting state associations and stressing the practical value of the vote. Her successor, Anna Howard Shaw, however, retreated to the emphasis on educational strategies.

In 1910, the Equal Franchise Federation of Western Pennsylvania, an affiliate of the Pennsylvania and national American woman suffrage associations, replaced the now defunct Allegheny County Equal Rights Association. A year earlier the ACERA had dropped its state and national affiliations in subtle protest against the lack of progress in the larger organizations. As an independent association, it died a quiet death. The new group, which retained most of the membership of the ACERA, devoted its first year to a concerted membership drive among both men and women. Determined to make friends, not enemies, the Equal Franchise Federation stressed conventional strategies rather than militancy.

In 1911, the PWSA persuaded the state legislature to hold hearings on woman suffrage. Legislators were sufficiently impressed with the merits of the cause to refer the matter to a special commission responsible for revising and codifying Pennsylvania's election laws. The Electoral Commission's willingness to hold its own hearings on the equal franchise issue momentarily renewed the hopes of Pennsylvania suffragists. Only three of seven commission members attended the hearing on March 12, 1912. The commission required speakers to provide statistical documentation for three questions: (1) Do the majority of women desire the vote? (2) Will the right of suffrage, if granted, be exercised generally by women? (3) Will the exercise by women result in a benefit to the community?<sup>9</sup> With such questions requiring more polling resources and more prophetic vision than they possessed, suffragists could hardly have been surprised when the Electoral Com-

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<sup>9</sup> Caroline Katzenstein, *Lifting the Curtain: The State and National Woman Suffrage Campaigns in Pennsylvania as I Saw Them* (Philadelphia, 1955), 75.

mission ruled that woman suffrage was not germane to its task and dismissed the issue with no recommendation to the legislature.

In the light of this lack of progress, Pittsburgh suffragists set three goals for their 1911-1912 program. First, they proposed opening a suffrage headquarters and library in Pittsburgh.<sup>10</sup> Second, they planned to help members write and practice short speeches on their conversion to the cause. Finally, and ultimately most important, they met in closed sessions from May to December 1911 to devise a strategy for launching a more activist program at the annual state convention in 1912.<sup>11</sup> Looking ahead to the chance to push their cause before a new general assembly in 1913, the women prepared to present their own slate of officers, to propose moving the state headquarters from Philadelphia to Harrisburg, and to discuss ways to rid the state organization of its passive, nonpolitical image. These changes, they believed, would be necessary to build crucial support in the previously-neglected rural areas of the state.<sup>12</sup>

This course of action differed markedly from the strategy of the state or national association. The NAWSA made speeches, prepared and distributed literature, and made an annual appearance before the congressional hearings on suffrage. It did not teach suffragists how to become effective speakers; moreover, the national leadership ignored legislators' desire for reelection. The Pittsburgh group proposed an approach that would prepare suffragists (of both sexes) to become knowledgeable and articulate speakers ready to lobby persistently among lawmakers and canvass the state for popular support. Though the women could not have known it then, a refinement of this early "Pittsburgh Plan" would later hold the key to national victory.

The determination of the Western District to pursue new strategies caught the 1912 state convention by surprise. The delegates consented to moving the state headquarters to Harrisburg. Then, after three ballots for the organization's top leadership, Jennie Roessing and three of her friends captured four of the state association's top positions, demonstrating the shift in power from eastern to Western Pennsylvania. Roessing, who was then vice-president of the Equal Franchise Federation of Western Pennsylvania, was elected president; Mrs. John O. Miller, the former Lucy Kennedy, was chosen secretary;

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<sup>10</sup> The suffrage headquarters opened in 1911 in the Jenkins Arcade in Pittsburgh.

<sup>11</sup> *Pittsburgh Post*, May 28, 1911.

<sup>12</sup> Jennie Bradley Roessing, "The Equal Suffrage Campaign in Pennsylvania," *Annals of the American Academy of Politics and Social Science* 56 (Nov. 1914): 155.

Mary Bakewell was selected to be vice-president from the Western District; and Hannah Patterson, auditor.

The PWSA's goal was passage of a woman suffrage amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution by 1915. The amendment procedure required that the state legislature pass the resolution twice — in successive biennial sessions of the general assembly, each time by majorities of the membership of both houses — and then it be ratified by a majority of those citizens voting at the next general election. To Jennie Roessing the task seemed clear — and formidable: setting up the Harrisburg headquarters, establishing close ties with each lawmaker, and canvassing the state for popular support. Apparently, however, she did not recognize the crucial importance of courting the enthusiastic support of suffragists in the Eastern District.

The suffragists faced new opposition. In late 1911, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage had been organized in New York City. The group promoted the belief that women could better serve the community without the ballot than if involved in party politics. Mrs. Horace Brock, president of the Pennsylvania chapter of the group, was elected vice-president of the national association. Her urging, coupled with the renewed activity of Allegheny County suffragists, prompted the organization of a Pittsburgh chapter of the anti-suffragists in February 1912. Membership, open by invitation only, quickly rose from fifty to over four hundred; more than twelve hundred others signed petitions of support.

The group's president, Julia Morgan Harding, typified the social prominence of the antisuffragists. As the great-granddaughter of Ebenezer Denny, Pittsburgh's first mayor, Harding claimed a place among the city's elite, yet she was no butterfly. She had been one of the original faculty members of Margaret Morrison College. Earlier she had raised the eyebrows of society matrons when she became club editor for a Pittsburgh newspaper in the 1890s. These experiences, however, did not shake her opposition to the vote for women. In her first speech to the antisuffragists, Harding pointed out that "woman suffrage, socialism, and Mormonism go hand in hand."<sup>13</sup> Just how little a feminist she was is suggested by her remark in a speech that she approved public spankings for women who made spectacles of themselves in street demonstrations, and her contention that women could not be trusted with the vote since they were more susceptible to bribery than men.<sup>14</sup> Her group, like other antisuffragist chapters,

<sup>13</sup> *Pittsburgh Leader*, Feb. 18, 1912.

<sup>14</sup> *Pittsburgh Post*, Dec. 3, 1912.

adopted an elitist posture that kept working-class women at a distance.

The antisuffragists' first public lecture defined both their opposition to woman suffrage and their social *éclat*. The press heralded the appearance of a noted antisuffragist, Minnie K. Bronson, at the Pittsburgh Conservatory of Music on March 29, 1912, as a major social event of the season. Bronson, who had worked in various federal agencies, was an authority on education and factory working conditions. Young society girls and debutantes served as ushers. The affair was hardly a mass meeting, however, with the audience described as "over a hundred."<sup>15</sup>

"The suffragists and the anti-suffragists are aiming at the same thing, better laws," Bronson said, "but we do not agree on methods to that end. The suffragists want to vote for better laws, but we, the antis, believe we have greater power without the vote."<sup>16</sup> Clearly convinced of the appropriateness of the "separate sphere," Bronson asked why women, whose special competence was in education and molding opinion, would want to participate in the decision-making for such masculine duties as building railroads or raising armies. In addition, she argued, the suffragists' point that working-class women needed the vote to improve factory conditions ignored data proving that most such women began work at age fourteen but then quit work for marriage and a family within five years, well before they reached the voting age of twenty-one. She appeared to discount statistics that showed married women comprised 15 percent of the female labor force in 1910.<sup>17</sup> Nor did she seem to recognize that since many women at home had daughters in the factories, they, too, would be concerned about working conditions.

The antisuffragists' elitism cost them both support by the press and wide public attention. Although prominent society women headed both the suffragists and the antisuffragists, the newspapers took the suffragists much more seriously, stressing their organizational activities and arguments, while treating the antisuffragist activities largely as society news. In the legislative campaign, Pittsburgh newspapers strongly supported the suffragists. Only the *Gazette-Times* made much effort to balance coverage of the two groups or to present antisuffragist arguments.

Jennie Roessing realized the educational task she faced in coun-

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<sup>15</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, Mar. 30, 1912.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, eds., *America's Working Women* (New York, 1975), 405.



teracting both this active opposition and, what was more of a challenge, the widespread indifference to woman suffrage throughout the state. That would come later. For now, her priority was to persuade a majority of both houses of the state's general assembly to support the suffrage resolution. The split between conservative and Progressive Republicans that had permitted the Democrat Woodrow Wilson to capture the presidency in 1912 had its effect on the Pennsylvania legislative elections. Although conservative Republicans kept control of both houses of the state legislature, the Democrats and several splinter Progressive factions cut their advantage.<sup>18</sup> This loss of conservative Republican support, coupled with the retention of seats by only 80 of the 207 incumbents in the state house of representatives, made 1913 a good year for the women to press the suffrage issue.

Winning over United States Senator Boies Penrose of Philadelphia, boss of the Republican political machine that was virtually unchallenged in Pennsylvania, proved to be Roessing's first political challenge. Senator Penrose immediately protested the introduction of the suffrage resolution. Since Republicans had dominated the state politically for years, the Democratic minority generally agreed to support Republican measures in return for a share of the patronage. Thus, support from the "boss" was doubly important to the suffragists. Jennie Roessing asked her friend, Isaac Clothier, of the mercantile firm of Strawbridge and Clothier, to arrange a meeting for her with the senator. Clothier, a director of the Philadelphia Equal Franchise Society and the father of PWSA vice-president Hannah Clothier Hull, quickly obliged.

Jennie Roessing soon learned that, for all his other faults, Penrose was both trustworthy and frank. He candidly admitted that the opposition of the liquor interests forced him to work against woman suffrage. On a second visit Roessing proposed that, as a "good sport," he let the enabling act pass, on the theory that the people were entitled to judge the issue. "Probably because he thought I was just a fool, he finally agreed to let us try, but from the beginning said we could not possibly get the bill through for he would have to see that we didn't."<sup>19</sup> Apparently the senator's certainty that he controlled a majority of the legislature allowed him to make a concession and permit the suffrage

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18 The Republicans lost five seats to the Democrats in the senate and thirty-four seats to the Democrats and Progressives in the house of representatives.

19 Roessing to Henrietta Krone, May 21, 1945, Jennie Bradley Roessing Papers, Archives of Industrial Society, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

measure to come up for a vote in the general assembly. Penrose warned Roessing that there was no statewide support for equal suffrage, but he conceded that if there were sufficient interest, any amendment, even this one, would pass.<sup>20</sup>

Gaining Penrose's assent was only the first step in securing state senate approval. Both Penrose and Roessing agreed in January 1913 that the suffragists had nine votes out of fifty in the Pennsylvania senate. Passage of the proposed amendment would require approval by a majority of the whole membership in each house. Jennie Roessing and Hannah Patterson stayed in Harrisburg that winter to make daily visits to individual senators. Getting support was not easy. "When we asked senators for their votes, they just laughed at us and said there wasn't a suffragist in their district, or if there was, they had never heard of him."<sup>21</sup> Still, the pressure worked; one by one, senators agreed to support the enabling act.

Twice the worried opposition tried to get the issue out of the way by springing a surprise vote in the senate on a resolution to postpone the motion. In each instance Lieutenant Governor John Merriman Reynolds cast the deciding vote to defeat the resolution. These were the only times in thirteen years that the president of the senate had voted on any question.<sup>22</sup> The senate then set April 25 as the date for the suffrage vote. The suffragists, with the target date in mind, feverishly quickened the pace of their campaign.

Early in April, on Roessing's last visit to Penrose before the vote, the senator complimented her on the suffragists' persuasive campaign. He admitted they now had twenty-two of the required twenty-six votes, but predicted they would lose.<sup>23</sup> Secretly Penrose must have worried that his own embarrassing failure to deliver Pennsylvania's electoral votes in 1912 to his candidate, William Howard Taft, might be eroding his control over state lawmakers.<sup>24</sup> In any event, the women continued campaigning.

Less than a week before the crucial vote, the projected senate count stood even at twenty-five for and twenty-five against. At that point, Hannah Patterson learned that Republican Senator Walter Mc-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Ida Husted Harper, ed., *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York, 1975), 5: 679.

<sup>23</sup> Roessing to Krone, May 21, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> In the most humiliating defeat of his political career, Penrose, who had pushed Taft's election, backed a candidate who ran a poor third to Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. For a description of the political forces in Pennsylvania at the time, see Sylvester K. Stevens, *Pennsylvania: The Keystone State* (New York, 1956), 593-604.

Nichols of Lackawanna County, a Penrose man, had agreed to vote for the bill if he received a bona fide resolution from the American Federation of Labor's Central Labor Union of Scranton. McNichols insisted, however, that a resolution urging him to support the suffrage measure had been repudiated by the union's membership. Patterson called Mrs. Maxwell Chapman, president of the Scranton suffrage organization, to urge her to contact the union's president. Chapman finally located Stephen McDonald, the union leader, in Paterson, New Jersey, at a union meeting. McDonald knew that Senator McNichols understood labor's position on the issue: as early as 1910, the Pennsylvania State Federation of Labor had adopted almost unanimously a resolution to support political candidates committed to equal suffrage.<sup>25</sup> Angry with the senator's refusal to accept his union's resolution, McDonald volunteered to go to Harrisburg on April 25.

Reporters had already written their stories of the suffragist defeat when Roessing, Patterson, and Chapman escorted McDonald to the senate. McDonald proceeded to Senator McNichols's desk, presented him with the prosuffrage resolution readopted by the Central Labor Organization, and "advised" him to vote for the enabling act.<sup>26</sup> The senator could hardly ignore the instructions of the powerful union's 70,000 members. "McNichols turned white, rose, and announced that although he had told the conferees he would vote against it, he had just heard from his constituents, and was obliged to change his vote."<sup>27</sup> The electrifying twenty-six to twenty-four passage of the measure in the senate led to prompt consideration and passage of the resolution in the house. Nowhere — except in the simultaneous Illinois crusade — had women suffragists demonstrated this sort of astute politicking. The well-publicized Pennsylvania legislative campaign introduced a new dimension in political tactics to struggling suffragists across the country.

With assurance from Senator Penrose that the amendment would pass easily in its second legislative test, Jennie Roessing directed her attention to fund-raising for the costly campaign before the statewide referendum in November 1915. She stunned the PWSA, meeting in Pittsburgh in October 1913, with a proposal to increase the budget from \$8,000 to \$50,000. She might have admitted that she had slept many nights on tables in the Harrisburg headquarters for lack of

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<sup>25</sup> Rachel Foster Avery, "Pennsylvania," *NAWSA Annual Report, 1910* (New York, 1911), 140.

<sup>26</sup> *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, Apr. 8, 1945.

<sup>27</sup> Roessing to Krone, May 21, 1945.

money to rent a room.<sup>28</sup> Or she might have mentioned taking out heavy accident insurance, with the PWSA as beneficiary, to insure continuation of the campaign in the event she suffered death or crippling injury.<sup>29</sup> Neither of these personal notes proved necessary. The delegates, recognizing the inadequacy of the \$8,000 budget, approved the proposed increase without dissent. A \$10,000 pledge from Mrs. William Thaw, Jr., the well-known Pittsburgh philanthropist, and a \$5,000 pledge from the Pittsburgh Equal Franchise Federation brought gasps from the audience and set the pace for the others. One may speculate that Roessing had obtained promises of support from Mrs. Thaw and the Pittsburgh Federation in advance. In any case, other local organizations quickly registered their own generous pledges of support.

The attempts of these groups to raise money for the campaign provide colorful evidence of commitment to their cause. The state organization received little regular support from dues and donations at local meetings. A PWSA attempt to sell suffrage stamps to women to use on their personal correspondence met an early end when the United States Post Office Department noted their similarity to postage stamps and banned their sale.<sup>30</sup> It took the sacrifices of individual women across the state to meet the budget goal. One woman churned, sold, and delivered five hundred quarts of cottage cheese to make her \$50 donation. Another woman sacrificed a new winter suit to make a \$25 contribution. Others sold eggs, cherries, apples, and strawberries.<sup>31</sup> Some local groups sponsored "Attic Day" rummage sales; others placed suffrage melting pots in key locations for women to throw in pieces of jewelry. Still others raised money through "Dollar Days" of self-denial.<sup>32</sup> The women's success in fund-raising made a \$100,000 budget in 1915 seem a realistic possibility.

The ensuing campaign revealed Jennie Roessing's leadership qualities. She understood the need to tailor the suffrage message to the concerns of each county. Dramatic parades and outdoor meetings drew public attention to the cause in large cities, but the same strategy might alienate potential supporters in small towns. For her, the personal touch was important, and no group was too small to address.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Braddock News-Herald*, Aug. 12, 1915.

<sup>30</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Nov. 29, 1913.

<sup>31</sup> Roessing, "Equal Suffrage Campaign," 158.

<sup>32</sup> Henrietta Krone, "Dauntless Women: The Story of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Pennsylvania, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1947), 89.

Roessing's commitment to the thankless drudgery of canvassing the state was a concept many suffragists found incomprehensible.

Colleagues described Roessing as capable, sincere, hard-working, determined, energetic, persuasive, and attentive to details. At times, however, she seemed over-aggressive, domineering, and power-hungry.<sup>33</sup> Her lifelong friend and coworker, Hannah Patterson, often soothed ruffled feelings to maintain harmony within the movement. Roessing and Patterson were unusually close friends who offered each other much-needed emotional support during the long campaign.

Roessing's passion for thoroughness in the crusade took its toll on her energy. Exhausted, she resigned as president of the PWSA in mid-February 1914. In less than eleven months, she had spent 112 days at suffrage headquarters in Harrisburg and, as only one of her office duties, had responded to 3,780 letters. In addition, she traveled 10,201 miles on campaign speaking engagements.<sup>34</sup> Convinced that the PWSA should address every Grange, labor union, church society, men's gathering, and college group in the state, Roessing set an example for the organization by consenting to speak to any group, however small, on the suffrage theme. In her absence, Hannah Patterson served as acting president. After a brief vacation, Roessing resumed her personal crusade, and the PWSA reelected her president at its next annual meeting in November 1914.

Although Roessing and Patterson had resigned from their positions in the Allegheny County Equal Franchise Federation when they assumed their state posts, they kept in close touch with their former associates. They urged suffragists throughout the state to adopt — or adapt — successful strategies of the Western District. In particular, they praised Mary Bakewell and Lucy Miller's School for Suffrage Workers. The school, which opened in January 1914, offered twelve two-hour classes on practical politics for more than a hundred Pittsburgh women. Taught by University of Pittsburgh faculty, individual sessions focused on the fundamentals of government and constitutional law, the legal status of women, taxation, public speaking, and the varied concerns of Progressive reformers.<sup>35</sup> The school was designed to create a capable and informed suffrage leadership, a necessity for a successful campaign to convert the antis and motivate the many uncommitted voters in the state.

To prepare for the PWSA's intensive educational campaign,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> *Pittsburgh Post*, Feb. 3, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, Jan. 14, 1914.

Hannah Patterson devised a plan for coordinating suffrage activities throughout the state. Drawing on Carrie Chapman Catt's national organizational model, she organized a Woman Suffrage party under the direction of the PWSA to enroll all advocates of equal suffrage. The party divided the state into precincts for conducting all suffrage activities. Precinct leaders received their directions from state leaders through a hierarchy of division, county, and legislative district headquarters, and were told not to initiate activities or make statements without authorization from state headquarters. The resulting system was designed, among other things, to put pressure on office seekers. "No politician could . . . go into any district in Pennsylvania and get the endorsement of a single woman suffragist there unless orders had gone out from headquarters." <sup>36</sup>

Campaign literature prepared by the state organization addressed the varied concerns of voters. The PWSA counted heavily on the continued support of organized labor and, consequently, used the union label on all stationery and campaign literature. Testimonials from Catholic clergymen reassured voters that the church's theology in no way forbade woman suffrage and added that votes for women could be a powerful force for moral reform. Literature for farmers stressed the wisdom of allowing women to vote to protect their homes and children. After all, would it be right to leave a farm, which the wife would inherit on her husband's death, unprotected by a citizen's vote? Or was it right to deny a mother a vote in matters relating to consumer affairs or the health, welfare, and education of her family? Pamphlets for businessmen pointed out that it would be good business to give women, who had repeatedly shown their honesty, ability, and business sense in a variety of roles, a voice in their areas of expertise or special concern. Wilmer Atkinson, owner-editor of the influential *Farm Journal* and president of the Pennsylvania Men's League for Woman Suffrage, collected testimonials from the governors of states having woman suffrage. The PWSA distributed these endorsements as evidence that the evils feared by the antis were largely unfounded.

To convey suffrage arguments graphically, Jennie Roessing hired several cartoonists to draw cartoons for distribution to sympathetic newspaper publishers throughout the state. The *Philadelphia North American* and the *Pittsburgh Leader* were particularly supportive of equal suffrage, but publishers in Harrisburg, Lancaster, Reading, Wilkes-Barre, and Scranton also printed the cartoons and covered suffrage activities. Some cartoon plates were widely distributed;

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<sup>36</sup> *New York Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1915.

others were intended for exclusive release in one city. In either case, the cartoons attempted to address the concerns of the antis and build support among the uncommitted.

Though isolated cartoons stressed the justice of equal suffrage, most emphasized instead the political influence of women voters in combating social evils. The "Cradle of Liberty" (Figure 1) illustrates the justice theme. Other cartoons suggest opportunities for women to improve the quality of life in their communities. "Woman's Place Is in the Home" (Figure 2), for example, depicts the close relationship between the concerns of city hall and those of homemakers. Similarly, "Suffrage: I Am Fortunate Indeed in My Enemies" (Figure 3) clearly contrasts women's values with those of the liquor interests, corrupt politicians, white slavers, and food adulterers. "The Age of Chivalry" (Figure 4) chides the antis for their naive view that their interests were adequately protected without the vote. Although the Pennsylvania suffragists generally avoided linking their cause with Prohibition, "Little Pennsy — 'But I'm Getting Too Big for the Bottle'" (Figure 5) suggests that the liquor interests were not eager for women to win the vote. The publication of carefully chosen cartoons in strategic newspapers enabled the PWSA to present a memorable argument for equal suffrage to large audiences at relatively little cost to the association.

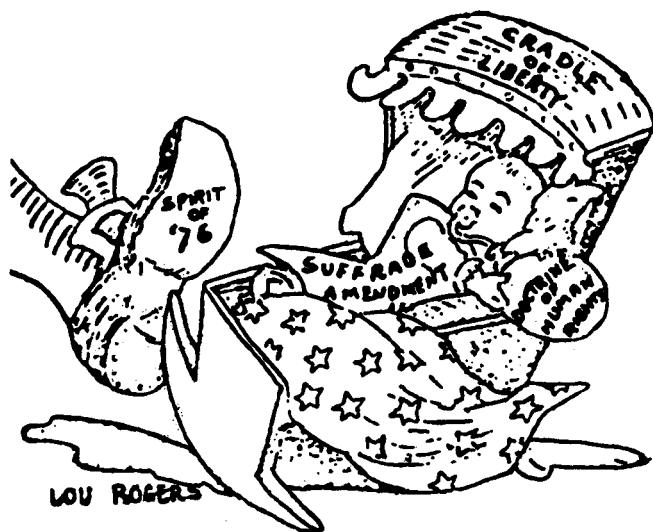
In 1915, the introduction of the suffrage amendment in the general assembly created none of the opposition it had aroused two years earlier. On February 9, the resolution passed in the house of representatives by a vote of 130-71, and less than a month later, the senate passed the amendment by a 37-11 vote. The PWSA could now concentrate on preparations for the November referendum.

At this point several members of the PWSA executive board, including Mary Bakewell, became disenchanted with the seemingly slow progress of the educational campaign and urged more dramatic, large-scale action. Two underlying concerns seemed to prompt their dissent. Some Philadelphia suffragists resented working in the precinct organizations of the Woman Suffrage party rather than in women's clubs of their own social class. Others, apparently expecting victory in the referendum, feared the power Jennie Roessing might wield as leader of the state's women voters if her campaign strategy succeeded.<sup>37</sup> The activist minority found little support for its position, and the association continued, without change, its quiet campaign of organized

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37 Krone, "Dauntless Women," 42.

Figure 1



## "WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOME"

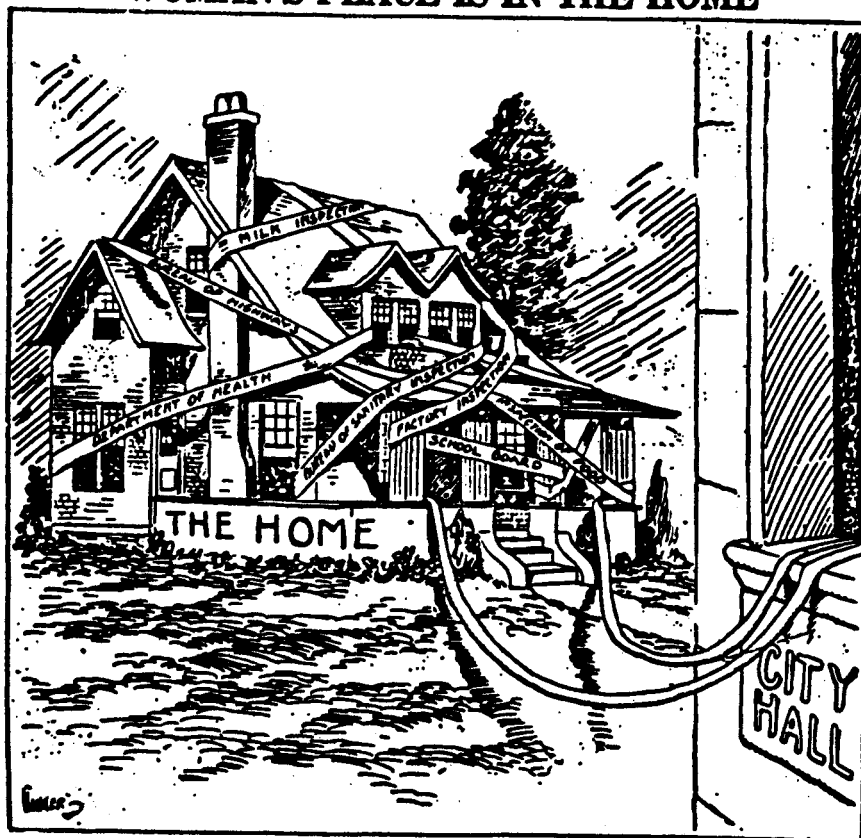


Figure 2

NOTE: All five cartoons are from the files of the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association Papers, 1910-1920, in the Pennsylvania Historical Collection and Labor Archives, Pennsylvania State University.



*Suffrage: "I am Fortunate Indeed in My Enemies"*



Figure 3

# THE AGE OF CHIVALRY

(AS THE 'ANTI-SEES IT)

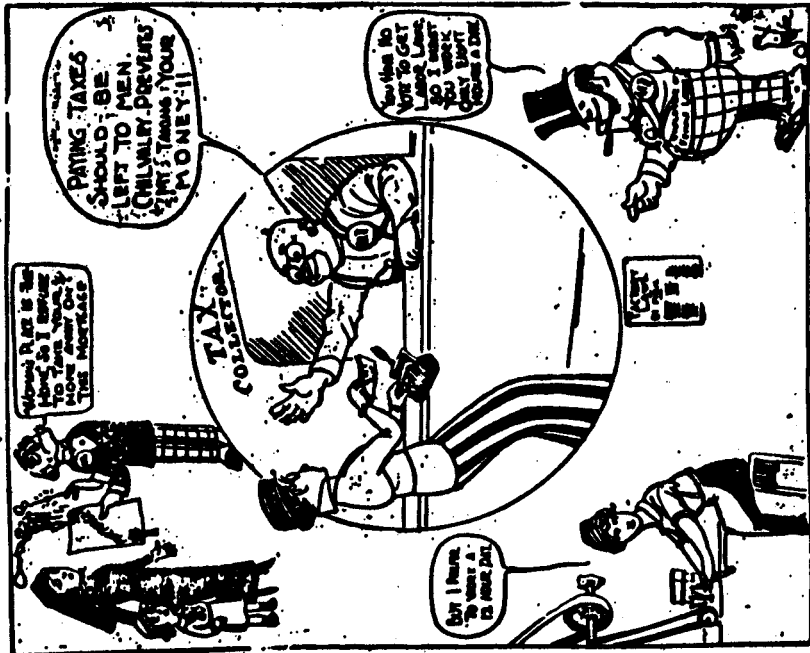
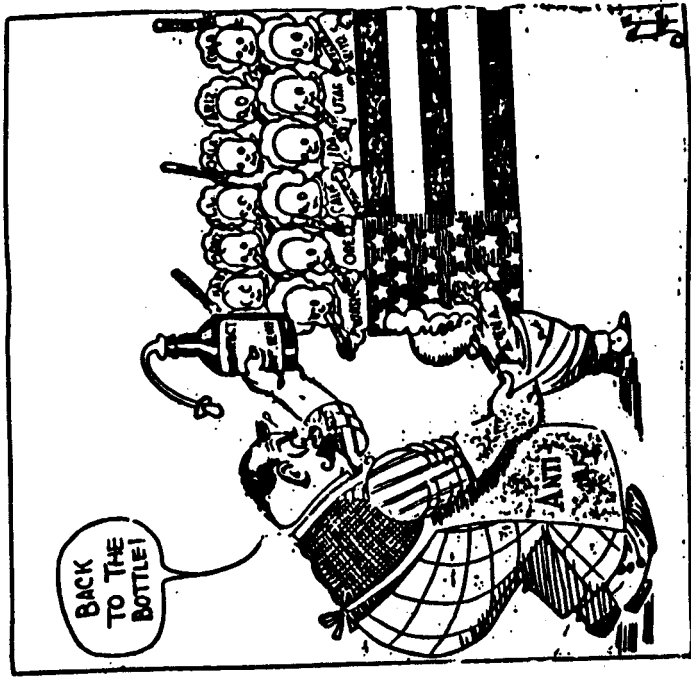


Figure 4



Little Penny—"But I'm Getting Too Big for the Bottle!"

Figure 5

education. This early rift in the state organization, however, forecast a split in the PWSA following the election in November.

During the spring of 1915 local suffrage organizations sponsored two major activities to spread their message. First, they distributed packets of flower seeds to woman suffrage advocates. By early summer the yellow flowers of the suffrage gardens gave a rough indication of the statewide support for the amendment. On May 26, women's groups prepared luncheons for the men on Good Roads Day, the annual occasion on which men pledged their contributions for the maintenance of roads in the state. After lunch the women presented their arguments for equal suffrage.

The tour of the women's Liberty Bell of Suffrage, a huge bronze replica of the original Liberty Bell, constituted the most picturesque feature of the campaign. The clapper was fastened tightly, and a sign posted on the truck carried the women's message: "This bell will ring for the first time on the day that the women of Pennsylvania are granted the right to vote." The tour left Sayre, in Bradford County, on June 23 and drove west through the northern tier of counties, then south through the western counties, arriving in Pittsburgh for the big Americanization Day festivities before continuing on to Philadelphia by Election Day. Suffrage supporters and local celebrities met the bell party at each county line and then accompanied the Liberty Bell to an open-air meeting in each county seat. Another delegation accompanied the truck to the neighboring county, thus making the Liberty Bell campaign one continuous statewide demonstration.

During the four-month pilgrimage, Jennie Roessing, accompanied by a corps of able suffrage speakers, drove the truck over 5,000 miles through difficult mountainous terrain and muddy country roads to introduce the women's crusade to the rural areas of the state. Determined to show their independence, the women rejected most offers of help, including speeches, from male suffragists. The women were not, however, so financially independent: their meager resources frequently forced them to beg for food and lodging along the way. The Liberty Bell of Suffrage, designed to spark the patriotic pride of Pennsylvanians, did, in fact, prove to be the campaign's most effective drawing card.

After a tiring summer of speeches, parlor meetings, fair appearances, outside convocations, and occasional parades, the women looked ahead to November 2 with relief but considerable apprehension. Their campaign had won a long list of endorsements: National Education Association, Grange, American Federation of Labor, Pennsylvania

Men's League for Woman Suffrage, National Federation of Women's Clubs, Women's Christian Temperance Union, Women's Peace party, as well as a number of influential newspapers and churches. However, neither major political party nor key political leaders backed the issue. Top Republicans, including Governor Martin G. Brumbaugh, Philadelphia's reform mayor Rudolph Blankenburg, and Senator Boies Penrose, all remained silent on the issue. So did Joseph S. Guffey, leader of the Democratic organization in Western Pennsylvania. Although the liquor interests remained publicly aloof from the campaign, rumors abounded that they were making heavy contributions to the last-minute drive of the antisuffragists.<sup>38</sup> Political leaders predicted impending defeat for Amendment 1, with the probable margins ranging from 70,000 to 350,000 votes. Worse still, the *New York Times* survey of Republican county chairmen indicated that the issue would fail by more than a two-to-one margin.<sup>39</sup>

It did fail, but not by much. On November 2, 1915, Amendment 1 was defeated by a vote of 441,034 to 385,348. This margin of 55,686 was less than anyone other than the suffragists had predicted. Further analysis revealed that, excluding Philadelphia, the issue failed by only 10,414 votes. The majority against woman suffrage was 41,153 in nine counties heavily populated by Germans. On the other hand, the most encouraging statistic to suffragists was that Allegheny County, where the suffragists had concentrated their activity, approved the amendment by more than three thousand votes, making it the largest urban area in America to vote for woman suffrage until that date.

Analyses of the factors involved in the defeat were almost as varied as the analysts. Wilmer Atkinson, president of the Pennsylvania Men's League for Woman Suffrage, termed the election a "tainted verdict" because unauthorized sample ballots in strategic Philadelphia polling booths had been marked "yes" on Amendments 2, 3, and 4, but "no" on Amendment 1, the suffrage issue. Atkinson held the liquor interests and "kept" among the electorate responsible for the negative outcome.<sup>40</sup> Since women had always been prominent in the cause of temperance, the liquor interests anticipated that they would use the franchise to vote in Prohibition. Strong support for woman suffrage from the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Prohibition party only reinforced their fears. Consequently, the liquor interests

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38 *Ibid.*, 110.

39 *New York Times*, Oct. 31, 1915.

40 Wilmer Atkinson, *An Autobiography* (Philadelphia, 1920), 351.

had, for years, dedicated themselves to defeating woman suffrage causes.<sup>41</sup>

Newspaper editorials, too, generally focused on the opposition of the liquor interests, which had strongly influenced the political machines. In a speech in Scranton, Congressman John Farr, noting that suffrage rallies in counties with large German populations had attracted more men than women, suggested that if German women had displayed greater enthusiasm for the vote, their husbands, while certainly not eager to take a step that might lead to Prohibition, might still have voted differently.<sup>42</sup> Although Jennie Roessing publicly pointed her finger at the liquor interests and small-time politicians, privately she blamed the conservative, older suffragists who, from the start, expressed doubt that Pennsylvania or any other eastern state was ready for woman suffrage in 1915.<sup>43</sup>

Surely Jennie Roessing also evaluated her own effectiveness in the campaign. She and her friends clearly had considerable success in converting legislators and voters. Probably she found it more difficult to assess her shortcomings. She could not have anticipated the polling-booth tactics of her fiercest opponents. But she might have foreseen that the same diligence used in the Pittsburgh campaign would be needed to win against the determined opposition in Philadelphia. And she should have recognized that attention to the individual concerns of Philadelphia suffragists might have converted their halfhearted compliance into enthusiastic support for the "Pittsburgh Plan." Perhaps Roessing's biggest error was in not applying her winning ways to the older suffragists she had defeated in 1913. After all, they could have helped her more than anyone else in turning around the election results in the crucial eastern part of the state. Despite the defeat, Jennie Roessing had good reason to be optimistic about the future of suffragism in Pennsylvania. As she pointed out to the press the day after the election, "Woman suffrage is more alive in Pennsylvania today than it ever has been."<sup>44</sup> She never doubted that the momentum of the campaign would carry Pennsylvania suffragists on to victory in the near future.

Roessing's leadership in the Pennsylvania legislative battle illustrates the influence the dedicated individual can have on the policies of government; in this way her work resembles the efforts of other

41 Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: An Era of Excess* (Boston, 1962), 94.

42 *Philadelphia North American*, Nov. 28, 1915.

43 Jennie Bradley Roessing, "Pennsylvania's Story," *Woman's Journal* 46 (Nov. 13, 1915): 360.

44 *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Nov. 4, 1915.

Progressive crusaders. More specifically, her strategy of "organized education" and her efforts to replace diffuse propaganda techniques with sharply focused, aggressive tactics reflect the prevalence of the ideal of business efficiency among Progressives. Moreover, she and her friends had shown that women, whose role had been deemed peripheral to the political process, could, without either the vote or official government position, apply political pressure and wield substantial political power if they organized.

Just as Jennie Roessing serves as a model of the successful political reformer, so her Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania campaigns set the example for the larger national movement. By demonstrating that women could gain the support of eastern urban voters, the Allegheny County women raised the hopes of suffragists everywhere. Furthermore, the Pennsylvania campaign anticipated the changing themes of the national suffrage crusade. Only when Pennsylvania suffragists altered their rationale from the justice of equal suffrage to the opportunities for women to make themselves more effective guardians of the home did they convert large numbers of antis and the uncommitted. This philosophical distinction proved important in the national campaign as well. However, emphasizing the practical value of the vote rather than the justice of equal rights insured that suffrage alone would not bring equality for women. Thus passage of the Nineteenth Amendment set the stage for another long struggle for equal rights.<sup>45</sup> The women's rights movement of the sixties marked the beginning of that second struggle.

### *Epilogue*

In November 1915, both the Pennsylvania and national suffrage organizations changed leadership. After resigning their positions in the PWSA, Roessing and Patterson lobbied persistently at the national convention for the election of Carrie Chapman Catt to replace the incumbent president, Anna Howard Shaw. Catt, in turn, accepted the presidency only on the condition that Jennie Roessing and Hannah Patterson serve with her on the national executive board.<sup>46</sup>

As chairman of the organization's Congressional Committee, Roessing prepared to duplicate her efforts with the Pennsylvania General Assembly and make the Congressional Committee "the best

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<sup>45</sup> Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York, 1980), 385.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Gray Peck, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Biography* (New York, 1946), 67.

fighting organization in the country."<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, Patterson attempted to implement nationally the precinct plan she had devised for Pennsylvania. Roessing's and Patterson's intense lobbying efforts at the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 1916 resulted in vaguely-worded statements in each platform favoring equal suffrage through state action.

The war, and particularly President Wilson's desire to get women's support for the Fourteen Points, hastened passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. By 1918, neither Roessing nor Patterson was active in the suffrage campaign. Roessing had returned to Pittsburgh late in 1917 to care for her terminally-ill father. Since 1917, Patterson had been serving as assistant secretary of war under Newton D. Baker. Still, both women had the satisfaction of knowing that their strategies guided the final drive for equal suffrage.

Yet if the women had illusions that suffrage would bring equality for women, they learned otherwise. After conducting a political poll in 1935, Patterson abandoned plans to run for Congress when it became apparent that Pennsylvania would not elect a woman at that time. In the 1940s, Roessing infuriated a number of Pittsburgh executives by insisting on her right to attend stockholders' meetings and question management policies. Her studious attention to the details of the male business world eventually earned her their respect — just as her advance preparation had earned her the respect of lawmakers years earlier. In time, the corporate officials came to regard her as charming, witty, and knowledgeable. Their recognition of her effectiveness, if not their acceptance of her as an equal, came when officials made a standing date with her for lunch after the annual meetings and presented her with orchids — instead of cigars.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps characteristically, Roessing had, once again, compromised equality for a concrete gain in women's rights.

<sup>47</sup> Jennie Bradley Roessing, "Federal Suffrage in a Dynamic State," *The Public: An International Journal of Fundamental Democracy* 20 (n.d.): 814.

<sup>48</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, Mar. 11, 1956.